

BREDEHOFT

The Political Opinions of Lord Byron

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THE POLITICAL OPINIONS OF LORD BYRON

BY

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THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

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I HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER MY SUPERVISION BY

Nellie Matilda Bredehoft

ENTITLED The Political Opinions of Lord Byron

BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING THIS PART OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE

DEGREE OF Master of Arts

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INTRODUCTION

A peculiar difficulty attaches to the study and treatment of the political life of Byron. Wordsworth, Shelley, Coleridge, Southey, can be followed directly in their political courses. Each held a definite standpoint at every time in his life, with only the exception of the comparatively short conflict which came to him with the dashing of his ideals in the failure of the French Revolution. Although Byron was by birth a member of the Conservative class, his temperament would seem to draw him all to the other side. And when we have established him as temperamentally a Radical, impulsiveness and impatience of restraint the central elements of his nature, the source of his amiable as well as of his detestable traits, there comes before us that store of plain unlordly common sense, so salutary in that time when it was apparently so rare,- that square straight vision of things as they are to the ordinary man, which, combined with the keen flashes of insight of his intuitive nature, makes his vision among the truest of the poets.

Here again comes a paradox- this mixture in Byron of sincerity and sham, of straightforwardness and foolish pride, of honest self-discernment and childish conceit. It may be contrary to the usual opinion to call Byron sincere, when the most striking of his characteristics are his proneness to attitudinize and his craving for exaggeration, bigness, theatrical effect. This propensity to color too highly is, however, the least of the difficulties in the way of a study of Byron's real opinions. The parallax of exaggeration can be fairly computed after a reading of a number of the letters

and poems taken from various periods of his life. The poseur is indulged in not from a motive to deceive, but from the innate joy of acting a part, and sometimes to nonplus the curious and over-serious, and make them objects for his own amusement.

What does trouble us, however, is to find where this fundamental sincerity is impaired by his rank and its social advantages,- to know how much enters into his actions of that, how much of his inactivity in the cause he held to comes from a belief that efforts on his part would be futile. To what extent are his political movements touched by laziness or apathy, and roused into furious outbreaks of zeal by injury either to his personal pride or high ideals of justice; like the old Teutonic warrior of brutal strength, and marvelous endurance and mental fire, roused from besotted heavy ease on the hearth? How much of his neglect of privileges and duties as a member of the parliamentary body is due to the irksome plodding usual to legislative proceedings? What proportion of his radical leanings were due to his convictions, what part to delight in being contradictory and satiric? Of allusions to political questions and events in his works, how much is politics, how much merely poetry? What would he have done in a political way in England had not his marital relations and the storm of abuse they called forth, driven him from his native land? And after he had become established in Europe, to what extent did the friendship of Liberals, (that came only circumstantially through a love affair), and personal love of excitement and glory determine his career? What would have been his course had he been permitted to live?

Such are the questions that crave answer in a consideration of Byron's real political status, making the study of absorbing interest and equally absorbing difficulty. These personal questions cannot be answered without

a general knowledge of the political situation in England and Europe during Byron's time, and of the particular instances of democratic uprisings with which he was connected in Italy and in Greece.

I.

The year following Byron's birth in 1788 saw the beginning of the French Revolution. The Terror reigned when Byron was only six years old. By the time that he had reached young manhood, Freedom, Equality and Brotherhood had lost their original glamor. Napoleon became Emperor of the French when Byron's age was fifteen. So Byron had the advantage over the older poets in the experience that carried less intensity, but a broader outlook; but he missed that time of which was said,

"Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,
But to be young was very heaven!"

He fell upon evil days. The hope of free, enlightened government and society was crushed for the time in this country as in France and the rest of Europe, and the Mal de Siècle overshadowed him.

Before the graver developments of the French Revolution came, obstructing liberal legislation in England, reform had been in the ascendancy. Parliament had gained in power after the Revolution of 1688, and Walpole and the elder Pitt had steadily built up its strength. During the latter half of the eighteenth century, the Enlightenment had touched politics forcibly. The Whigs held the upper hand, with a few minor exceptions, until King George III, whose one object was to regain for the sovereign the power he had lost during the age of Walpole, succeeded in establishing the ministry of Lord North. After him, with a year's interval, William Pitt, the younger, accepted the ministerial office from the king and was endorsed by the people, who rebelled against the domineering tone developed in Parliament itself. Pitt, like his father, was a member of the Whig party, which stood, as opposed to the Tory, for the power of Parliament rather than that of the king as the paramount force in English national life, and tended toward liberal legislation for the people. It is true that in American and some other affairs he had taken a Whig stand along with Fox, Burke, and other influential men; but to accept the appointment from the king was to put himself upon Tory ground.

Pitt, in his first years, tactfully managing the king, had followed an advanced Liberal policy, thus forming a new Tory party. Soon after he had entered the House of Commons, he had introduced a bill for parliamentary reform, which was defeated. In 1784, the year after he became Prime Minister, he brought forward a similar measure: many of the deteriorated nomination boroughs were to be abolished, and the owners paid for their loss. This also was defeated; so Pitt gave up the attempt to force through the House a measure which was opposed to the interests of a majority of its members, and it remained for a later generation to make this good project a fact.

For Catholic Emancipation Pitt took a decided stand. The oppression borne by the Catholics until about 1778 was most distressing. Then, under the pressure of the American war, when many troops had to be withdrawn from Ireland, some of the old drastic religious and personal laws were removed. The Test Act was repealed, and also the law which gave the whole property to the eldest son who became a Protestant. Among other liberties conceded, a Catholic was no longer prohibited from owning a horse worth more than five pounds. In 1782, under pressure of patriotic enthusiasm that bade fair to become dangerous, the freedom of the Irish Parliament under the king was recognized in England. The Catholics had no part in this victory. They had, as before, no franchise, no representation, no political existence. In 1793, however, a bill was passed through the Irish Parliament which granted to Catholics the right to vote and opened to them almost all situations, civil and military; but membership in the Parliament was still withheld. In 1794, Pitt used his influence to have the Catholics entirely emancipated. When the liberating^{measure} was passed, the king unexpectedly vetoed it. In 1800, the year of the union of the Irish Parliament with the English, Pitt, in alarm for the health of the king, who had thus shown his disapproval of Catholic Emancipation, refrained from his intention of bringing up the issue. As this measure had been practically pledged to the Catholics as a reward for their aid in the Union, Pitt found himself in a dilemma, and resigned. Before this time he had established himself as one of the greatest and wisest leaders of the English people; and yet he became identified with cruel and repressive measures.

With the spread of the French ideas of liberty and equality had come a general awakening to needed reform of abuses which before had been borne by the bulk of the people with apathy. A less stringent libel law and

abolition of the slave trade were the milder demands of an awakened middle class. The old Whig associations, the Constitutional Society, and the Revolutionary Society, originally formed to celebrate and foster the victory of the people in the Revolution in 1688, were revived, ostensibly in the cause of popular liberty. Against them Burke directed his "Reflections on the Revolution in France." New associations, among which the one called "The Friends of the People" was the most prominent, were organized in the same cause. These societies adopted as their principles universal suffrage, frequent elections for Parliament, and other measures that would have put the government largely into the hands of the people.

Popular exhibitions of revolutionary spirit went so far as attempts to assassinate the king. But these were isolated cases; and the season of violent manifestations was of short duration. The revolutionary passion for equality, and freedom from hereditary rule did not permeate the masses of the people as it did in France. The conditions of the lower classes, though by no means flourishing, was fairly comfortable in comparison with the sad state of affairs in European countries. Inequalities, so widely distributed and so deeply disastrous in France, were plentiful in England also, but they were in general of a kind that affected every day life rather indirectly than directly. As the most prominent of these injustices we recognize the unequal distribution of parliamentary constituencies and the oppressive political disabilities of the Roman Catholics. But the government was at least partially representative, so the outlook always carried some hope. The people as a whole were not profoundly affected by the revolutionary doctrines of France. Open endorsement of the extreme French ideas was confined to the theoretical opinions and imaginative flights of the educated. It is true that these opinions had travelled far and in some of the most oppressed sections, as in

Ireland and Scotland, took considerable hold on the people; but the strong ministry of Pitt, and the reaction which set in after the atrocities which developed in France, worked together to keep England from serious danger of internal revolution.

Pitt had in reality looked with favor upon the first activities of the French agitators. He hoped that a constitutional government would be established in France, precluding, of course, any idea but that of a constitutional monarchy. With the continuation of extreme and turbulent developments, his whole attitude changed. He embraced the policy that the one safe way to keep away all danger of revolution was to check the smallest beginnings of it, whether they were intentionally rebellious or not. Dangerous extravagances in France, the issuing of the revolutionary propaganda, the menace to English commercial power in the opening of the Scheldt river, and finally, the execution of Louis XVI, led to the declaration of war between the two nations. Immediately anti-reform legislation set in. A motion for parliamentary reform was rejected by a large majority; two new Treason Acts and an Alien Act were passed; the Whig societies for liberty were disbanded; agitators of liberal sentiment were prosecuted; and in 1794 the Habeas Corpus Act was suspended. In 1794 Burke, the Duke of Portland, and many other influential Whigs seceded from their own party and joined the Tories. Fox and Grey remained. About the same time, during the Reign of Terror, the popular reaction set in apace, and those who were on the side of France fell to a decided minority. With the stream went Wordsworth and Southey, who were so heartily despised by Byron for their defection. In 1797, as the result of a monetary crisis brought on by the war, the Bank of England suspended cash payments. In 1798, after an income tax had been imposed, Fox and his followers, regarding Pitt's policy as dangerous to liberty, seceded from

Parliament.

The commercial disorders caused by the war and heightened by bad harvests, pressed heavily on the poor, among whom rioting broke out from time to time throughout the period. Discontent was aggravated by the industrial storm which had been gathering for a number of years and which broke out before the end of the war with considerable confusion in its path. In 1797 petitions for fixing a scale of minimum wages were met by a hastily prepared Combination Act which made all trade combinations illegal. The object of this law was to prevent organized discontent and popular risings. In the confusion, scarcity riots and labor outbreaks could only with difficulty be distinguished from essentially revolutionary disturbances; so all alike were treated with summary harshness. By 1812 the distress caused among the artisans by the scarcity of labor, the result of new inventions in weaving machinery, reached alarming consequences. Hundreds of machines were broken, mills and granaries were destroyed, and in a few cases manufacturers were murdered. The general harshness of Parliament toward the populace extended to these cases, and the breaking of weaving frames was made punishable by death.

The reactionary policy was steadily continued, and was not completely defeated until the Reform Bill passed in 1832. It culminated, in its broader significance, in the Congress of Vienna. This great convention of the arbiters of nations reverted to the ideas of the century before. The French Revolution seemed to have failed. They confirmed the divine right of legitimacy, disregarding the will of the people; and enthroned balance of power, disregarding the principle of nationality. They established Louis XVIII on the throne of France, because he was the legitimate monarch, a descendant of those who had ruled France as its sovereigns for centuries before, and who now could rule only through compulsion, sustained by the Allies, and not as

the holders of trust from their people. They neglected entirely the principle of nationality,- that proud spirit of patriotism which had risen in opposition to Napoleon's ruthless absolutism; which had been engendered along with a national consciousness of political liberty now felt by the many peoples of Europe and manifested most brilliantly in France. To satisfy the pride and the greed of the stronger rulers, and to maintain the balance of power between them, the smaller countries were divided among them regardless of the unity of race and language. Holland and Belgium were united under one king. Italy was separated and parcelled out to different rulers. It was not long until Holland and Belgium had separated and the Italians were rising for union under a native ruler. The spirit of independence revived again, and made itself felt throughout Europe and in South America. It is Byron's part in actively opposing oppression and espousing freedom in England, in Italy and in Greece, and his loyalty to the principle of liberty which interest us.

II.

Byron's political life may be said to have begun with his sixth year. In 1794, upon the death of his great uncle, he received the title which gave him, at his coming of age, a seat in the British Parliament. How greatly that title affected his imagination is symbolized by the effect it produced on him as a schoolboy. When the master, in calling the roll, for the first time said "Lord Byron," he burst into tears and was unable to answer.

At that time he was attending school in Aberdeen, Scotland, where his mother resided. His father had died in 1791, after having dissipated the greater part of both his own fortune and that of his wife. When Byron was ten years old, his mother removed to the estate of the Byrons at Newstead Abbey, in Nottinghamshire, where he was prepared for a public school. After a brief period at Newstead, his mother took him to London and Dulwich, where he attended Dr. Glennie's school. In 1801, his mother's interference with Dr. Glennie's discipline having become intolerable, Byron was sent to Harrow by his guardian, Lord Carlisle. He evidently showed considerable aristocratic pride there, if we may judge from the names of the boys who were his companions. They were almost all of his own station, Lords Delawaar, Dorset, and Clare being his particular friends.

One event of Byron's life at Harrow is of special interest to us, - a school-boy conflict over Napoleon. He remembers it in his journal of a later period.¹ "Ever since," he says, "I defended my bust of him at Harrow against the rascally time-servers when the war broke out in 1803, he has been a Heros de Roman of mine" To us it may seem a trifle strange that the boys

1. Byron's Works, Letters and Journals, ed. by R. E. Prothero.
Vol. II, p. 323. Journal, Nov. 17, 1813.

were not all admirers of the great military genius, as boys who read of him are today. But since Napoleon was fighting against their own country, and had shown himself dishonorable toward countries which he conquered, there was ample cause for difference of opinion. Even Byron's admiration, it seems, was not wholly unqualified, for he had shouted out at a schoolmate,

1. "Bold Robert Speer was Bony's bad precursor,

Bob was a bloody dog, but Bonaparte a worser."

In his sixteenth year Byron entered Cambridge. There he led a wild, reckless life, his mind filled rather with feats of athletic prowess and youthful larks than with study, or fitting himself for a political career, or building up theories of an ideal commonwealth as the young Shelley did at Oxford a few years later. The place, as might be expected, was rife with party feeling, especially among the spirited young fellows to whom the Whig cause of Opposition appealed. At the time when the Whigs for a short interval gained the upper hand under Grenville and Fox, the interest must have been considerable. Byron's life-long friend, John Cam Hobhouse, was an ardent votary of the popular principles which had adhered in the Puritan revolution. He and Byron belonged to the Cambridge Whig Club.

There is but one political reference in the letters of Byron's residence at Cambridge:

1. Letters and Journals, Vol. II, p. 323, Note.

1. "The Marquis of Tavistock was down the other day; I supped with him at his tutor's- entirely a Whig party. The opposition muster strong here now, and Lord Hartington, the Duke of Leinster, etc., etc., are to join us in October, so everything will be splendid."

Byron was, on the whole, less interested in politics than is the average young man of his age. He was really too much occupied with himself to let other considerations claim his attention. For the first time loosed from all bounds, with abundance of money to spend, he was intent upon having a good time, satisfying his curiosity and seeing London and life. The allowance of the youthful gentleman while at Cambridge was five hundred pounds per annum. It was more than he could really afford; but his expenditures were constantly exceeding that amount and he was often compelled to have recourse to the money-lenders. He furnished his rooms extravagantly, as befitted a lord. He and his friends dined often in London, and spent much time in and about the city. To escape his mother, who insisted upon living near him at Cambridge, he refused to continue his studies for a period of several months, and during that time resided in Picadilly Row. He found ample time and inclination for swimming and boxing. In the latter sport he was trained systematically by "Gentleman Jackson," who had been the champion boxer of London, and to whom his admiration went out more than to many of his Cambridge associates. During a vacation occurred the notorious meeting of convivial spirits, when Byron entertained several of his brilliant friends at Newstead Abbey.

1. Letters and Journals. Vol. I, 135. To Elizabeth Bridget Pigot, July 5. 1807.

It was in Cambridge days also that he wrote the "Hours of Idleness," those frivolous and sometimes indelicate amatory verses to several young ladies, or young ladies' names.

So the Byron of Cambridge, as the Byron of later life, was self-indulging and self-centered, though generous-hearted and lavish to his friends as well as to himself. He was not absorbed in altruistic schemes nor desire for political glory, and he took little thought of any kind for the future. It was his pleasure to enjoy the present moment and take things as they came. So when he had become of age, he went away on a lengthy tour to seek new adventure and new experience in the strange scenes of the Orient.

Although Byron was not an enthusiast, there is no doubt of the side in politics which he favored; nor is it to be questioned that he became broadly acquainted with the various issues of the time and the principles and fibre of many men prominent in government affairs. He erred sometimes in details, and threw out his contempt and ridicule too freely, as his early political poetry shows by many examples; but he must have absorbed much of his political data and convictions in his Cambridge days.

An interesting episode of his Cambridge career is his attachment to a young chorister, named Edleston, which shows a significant phase of his character. The relation was not properly one of friend to friend, equal to equal, but had a kind of feudal or oriental flavor, the Conrad motif of undisputed chief and free and loyal followers.

Some of his own references will show his political status at this time. He wrote in January, 1809, to John Hanson, his business adviser:

1. "I shall take my seat as soon as circumstances will admit. I have not yet chosen my side in politics, nor shall I hastily commit myself with professions or pledge my support to any men or measures, but though I shall not run headlong into opposition I will studiously avoid a connection with ministry. I cannot say that my opinion is strongly in favor of either party; on the one side we have the late underlings of Pitt, possessing all his ill fortune, without his talents; this may render their failure excusable, but will not diminish the public contempt; on the other, we have all the ill-sorted fragments of a worn-out minority: Mr. Windham with his coat twice turned, and my Lord Grenville who perhaps has more sense than he can make good use of; between the two and the shuttlecock of both, a Sidmouth, and the general foot ball Sir F. Burdett, kicked at by all and owned by none.

"I shall stand aloof, speak what I think, but not too often, nor too soon. I will preserve my independence, if possible, but if involved with a party, I will take care not to be the last or least in the ranks. As to patriotism, the word is obsolete, perhaps improperly so, for all men in the country are patriots, knowing that their own existence must stand or fall with the Constitution, yet everybody thinks he could alter it for the better, and govern a people, who are in fact easily governed, but always claim the privilege of grumbling; so much for Politics, of which I at present know little and care less; bye and bye, I shall use the senatorial privilege of talking, and indeed in such times, and in such a crew, it must be difficult to hold one's tongue."

Such a speech reveals a great deal of Byron. It shows already that cynicism and opposition which characterize him, his feeling of aloofness and lofty superiority. It is a kind of excuse for indifference. It shows his habitual disposition to find fault, and withal a kind of contempt for enthusiasm. We cannot but deplore this lack of enthusiasm in so young a man with such political advantages. The strain of bitterness and discontent always present with him, for which, to be sure, he had considerable cause, prevented it; besides, throughout his life he avoided enthusiasm as an attribute of the vulgar mind. The extract shows a clear grasp of the situation and a clear sense of values. From one side, it was to his credit that he was undecided as to his practical stand until he should enter into actual connection with the "men and measures" involved. In reality, however, there was no question as to his position, for by temperament and sympathies he could not be other than a Liberal, no matter what the composition of the parties might be. A word of his own speaks eloquently here. 1. "In politics he (William Gifford,) may be right too but that with me is a feeling- I can't ^{his} torify editor my nature."

To attempt to placate his mother, who for various reasons which we may imagine- the expense, the folly, the abandonment of political ambition- objected to his going abroad, he made the excuse so ready with the young, that his project would develop him for his future career; that it is a training for politicians to see other countries. This is true, no doubt, but far from any purpose that Byron had in travelling. Then he partially con-

1. Letters and Journals. Vol. III, p. 18.

tradicted himself by another pompous explanation.

1. "I shall perhaps essay a speech or two in the House when I return, but am not ambitious of a parliamentary career, which is of all things the most degrading and unthankful. If I could by my own efforts inculcate the truth, that a man is not intended for a despot or a machine, but as an individual of a community, and fit for the society of kings, so long as he does not trespass on the laws or rebel against just governments, I might attempt to found a new Utopia: but as matters are at present, in course you will not expect me to sacrifice my health or self to your or any one's ambition."

So Byron went abroad, without having received a degree from Cambridge. He did, however, first take his seat in the House of Lords. His demeanor on that occasion is interesting. It is described by his friend, Mr. Dallas, who accompanied him:

2. "His countenance, paler than usual, showed that his mind was agitated, and that he was thinking of the nobleman to whom he had once looked for a hand and countenance in his introduction to the House
. There were very few persons in the House. Lord Eldon was going through some ordinary business. When Lord Byron entered, I thought he looked still paler than before; and he certainly wore a countenance in which mortification was mingled with, but subdued by, indignation. He passed the

1. Letters and Journals. Vol. I, p. 284.

2. Dallas. Recollections of Lord Byron, p. 50 ff.

woolsack without looking round, and advanced to the table where the proper officer was attending to administer the oaths. When he had gone through them, the Chancellor quitted his seat, and went toward him with a smile, putting out his hand warmly to welcome him; and though I did not catch his words, I saw that he paid him some compliment. This was all thrown away upon Lord Byron, who made a stiff bow, and put the tips of his fingers into a hand,- the amiable offer of which demanded the whole of his. I was sorry to see this, for Lord Eldon's character is great for virtue, as well as talent; and, even in a political point of view, it would have given me inexpressible pleasure to have seen him uniting heartily with him. The Chancellor did not press a welcome so received, but resumed his seat; while Lord Byron carelessly seated himself for a few minutes on one of the empty benches to the left of the throne, usually occupied by the Lords in opposition. When on his joining me, I expressed what I had felt, he said: 'If I had shaken hands heartily, he would have set me down for one of his party- but I will have nothing to do with any of them, on either side; I have taken my seat, and now I will go abroad.' "

This incident reveals the mixture of shyness and pride so often present in his manner,- a strange ha^{sh}utiness which is as much the product of a self-consciousness making him suspicious, as of a really haughty spirit; and it shows again his desire to avoid all appearance of being influenced.

III.

In July, 1809, Byron sailed from England, and arrived at Lisbon about the middle of the month. He was in Spain and Portugal during a part of the most stirring years of the Napoleonic War in that quarter, and his Childe Harold reflects very faithfully the impressions he gained there. Naturally, like the English in general, he is ~~all~~ⁱⁿ admiration and praise for the patriotism and pluck of the Portuguese. Unlike the English, he condemns their ignorance and their filth, even in his poetry; and in a number of prose references he speaks of them in the lowest terms. When he comes to Spain, he grows really enthusiastic over the romantic land and its people. He sings the glory of the Maid of Saragossa, who heroically entered the field against the French. Napoleon is called "tyrant," "despot," "Gaul's Vulture." ^{1.} Indeed, the blindest admirer of Napoleon could not but condemn his despotic dealings with Spain and Portugal.

But England gets no praise from Byron for her aid to these countries. ^{2.} He sees in the English action only selfishness. The Convention of Cintra is blamed as a shameful blot upon the nation's honor. Such was the opinion in England as well, even among staunch believers in the

1. Childe Harold, Canto I, Stanza LII.

2. Instead of following up the English victory at Vimiera, Sir Hew Dalrymple concluded the Convention of Cintra with the French, by which the latter agreed to evacuate Portugal. This agreement, which looked like cowardice, or corruption, on the part of the English general, raised a storm of indignation in England. It is now considered to have been a signal success from a political point of view.

general war policy of the government; but other expressions show Byron's displeasure with England's part in the war. The Portuguese, he says,

1. " lick yet loathe the hand that waves the sword,
To save them from the wrath of Gaul's unsparing lord."

Let us notice the tenor of the following stanzas:

2. "Three hosts combine to offer sacrifice;
Three tongues prefer strange orisons on high;
Three gaudy standards flout the pale blue skies;
The shouts are France, Spain, Albion, Victory!
The foe, the victim and # the fond ally
That fights for all, but ever fights in vain,
Are met- as if at home they could not die-
To feed the crow, on Talavera's plain,
And fertilize the field that each pretends to gain."

3. "There shall they rot, Ambition's honour'd fools!
Yes, Honour decks the turf that wraps their clay!
Vain Sophistry! in these behold the tools,
The broken tools, that tyrants cast away
With human hearts- to what?- a dream alone.
Can despots compass aught that hails their sway?
Or call with truth one span of earth their own,
Save that wherein at last they crumble bone by bone?"

1. Canto I, Stanza XVI.
2. Canto I, Stanza XLI.
3. Canto I, Stanza XLII.

The italics do not appear
in the original.

1. "Enough of Battle's Minions! let them play
Their game of lives, and barter breath for fame,-
Fame that will scarce reanimate their clay;
Though thousands fall to deck some single name.
In sooth 'twere sad to thwart their noble aim
Who strike, blest hirelings! for their country's good,
And die, that living might have proved her shame."

There is here, to be sure, the poetic custom of decrying war; but the storm of contempt which Byron was soon to rain down upon England in the poetry of a little later period, as well as prose references to the war, show that the stanzas are more than mere poetical effusions. He believed with the Whigs that England should never have taken the field against the French. He saw in the stand she took, not a noble protection of the liberties of weaker nations, but the defense of her own tyrannical traditions; the rivalry of one despot with another; and thirst for national and personal power and glory and precedence. His bitterness toward the English policy long antedates the Congress of Vienna and Waterloo, when his whole soul cried out against the Allies, who humiliated Napoleon and chained the French spirit of liberty.

When the poet reaches Greece, he gives full sway to his passion for liberty. He revels in the beauty of nature and in the wealth of historic scenes; but they pale before their association with early Greek freedom. Byron's voice rises in a passionate appeal to the Greeks for reawakened pride

and liberty. He adjures them by all the names most sacred to Greek freedom to rise at once, without waiting for foreign help, and throw off the Turkish bondage.

1. "Hereditary bondsmen! know ye not

Who would be free themselves must strike the blow?

By their right arms the conquest must be wrought?

Will Gaul or Muscovite redress ye? No!

True, they may lay your proud despoilers low,

But not for you will Freedom's altars flame."

Byron has a good deal to say about the Greeks in notes to his verses. By common consent of the foreigners residing in Greece, the native people were said to be in a most degenerate state. The Greek character was cruel, treacherous, devoid of pride and honor, and, in Byron's opinion, only surpassed in general depravity by the Portuguese. But Byron comments thus:

2. "M. Fauvel, the French Consul, who has passed thirty years principally at Athens, has frequently declared in my hearing, "that the Greeks do not deserve to be emancipated; reasoning on the grounds of their 'national and individual depravity!' while he forgot that such depravity is to be attributed to causes which can only be removed by the measure which he reprobates."

1. Canto II, Stanza LXXVI.

2. Moore, Life and Works of Lord Byron, Vol. VIII, p. 119. (Ed. 1832)

We have a further opinion of Byron as to the emancipation of the Greeks.

1. "The Greeks will never be independent; they will never be sovereigns as heretofore, and God forbid they ever should! but they may be subjects without being slaves. Our colonies are not independent, but they are free and industrious, and such may Greece be hereafter."

This is no rabid Rousselianism. Byron recognized the inferior condition of the Greeks and their inability to rule themselves. He believed heart and soul in the principle of freedom; but he could not grant equality. His zeal for liberty was tempered by recognition of historical tradition and development, and by respect for men of talent and ability and strength, to whom power should be delegated by the governed to be used for good and not for evil,- for he believed that it takes might to make right prevail.

In the passage last quoted there is ^{in the reference to the colonies} a reflection of respect for the English governmental system. We find occasionally expressions of pride in the British character and government, which crop out above the contempt and stinging satire which he pours forth upon the cant and hypocrisy of his countrymen and their perversion of English liberty. He wrote:

2. " but Britons rarely swerve

From law, however stern, which tends their strength to nerve;"

and there is a certain tenderness in his appeal to the English to spare the relics of ancient Greece.

1. Moore, Life and Works of Lord Byron, Vol. VIII, p. 120. (Ed. 1832.
2. Canto II, Stanza XIX.

1. "What! shall it e'er be said by British tongue,
Albion was happy in Athena's tears?
Though in thy name the slaves her bosom wrung,
Tell not the deed to blushing Europe's ears;
The ocean queen, the free Britannia, bears
The last poor plunder from a bleeding land:
Yes, she, whose gen'rous aid her name endears,
Tore down those remnants with a harpy's hand,
Which envious Eld forebore, and tyrants left to stand."

The other, more prominent side of Byron's feelings toward England, we have in the last poem which he wrote before his return home, when he was to take an active part in the affairs alluded to in the "Curse of Minerva." The goddess first denounces Lord Elgin, the despoiler of the Grecian marbles, and turns then upon Britain; for

2. "Her's were the deeds- that taught her lawless son,
To do what oft Britannia's self had done."

Then follows a list of the offences committed by England against justice, honor, and freedom. The first allusion is to the Copenhagen expedition of 1807.

1. Canto II, Stanza XIII.
2. "The Curse of Minerva," ll. 211, 212.

1. "Look to the Baltic- blazing from afar,
Your old ally yet mourns perfidious war."

Then,

2. "Look to the East, where Ganges swarthy race
Shall shake your tyrant empire to its base;
.
.
.
.
.
.
So may ye perish!- Pallas when she gave
Your free-born rights, forbade ye to enslave."

Here is apparently a contradiction of the poet's implied praise of the English colonial system when he said. 3. "Our colonies are not independent, but they are free and industrious, and such may Greece be hereafter." It is, however, evidently a criticism of abuse of power by the English rather than of the colonial system itself.

"Look on your Spain!- she clasps the hand she hates,
But boldly clasps, and thrusts you from her gates.
Bear witness, bright Barossa! thou canst tell
Whose were the sons that bravely fought and fell.

1. "The Curse of Minerva," ll. 213, 214. The English had seized and destroyed the Danish fleet in order to anticipate the designs of the French upon it, although Denmark was a neutral country.
2. "The Curse of Minerva," ll. 221, 222, 227, 228.
3. See p. 20, note 1.

"But Lusitania, kind and dear ally,
Can spare a few to fight, and sometimes fly.
Oh, glorious field! by Famine fiercely won,
The Gaul retires for once, and all is done!
But when did Pallas teach, that one retreat
Retrieved three long olympiads of defeat?"

Byron's pride could not endure the failure of British arms. Dissatisfaction with the conduct of the war was general in England. The Walcheren and the Quiberon Bay expeditions had been colossal failures. Throughout there had been pitiful inefficiency and lack of vigor that made of campaigns only lost time and lost accomplishments. There were only the two really memorable sea victories of ~~Spice~~ and Trafalgar, and a late gain of headway by Wellington to offset the disaster. Byron was very bitter against the dissipation of funds and human lives, and the distress it caused in the home country.

1. "Look last at home," he cries, "ye love not to look there." There the war and the taxes have drained the vitality of the country, and famine and 2. "blest paper credit" prevail. Byron's own pecuniary difficulties accentuated this phase of his hatred of the policy of Castlereagh and the king. "The war," he continues, "is not for a patriotic cause, is not supported by the people at large; it is a ^{3.}mercenary war," ^{4.}carried on with "hirelings, purchased near and far," by arrogant leaders and members of Parliament,

1. "The Curse of Minerva," l. 239.
2. "The Curse of Minerva," l. 245.
3. "The Curse of Minerva," l. 266.
4. "The Curse of Minerva," l. 265.

for the glory or commercial advantage of the few at the expense of the many. And while 1. "the starved mechanic breaks his rusting loom," and 2. "jarring sects convulse a sister isle," these powerful few seek justification for neglect and oppression of their countrymen in selfish assistance to foreigners conquered by Napoleon, who, although at present over-stepping his power, still is the leader of the French propagandists of liberty."

1. "The Curse of Minerva," l. 271.
2. "The Curse of Minerva," l. 277.

IV.

In July, 1811, Byron reached England again. His return was saddened by the death of some of his dearest friends and of his mother. After several months of business cares,- negotiations concerning the recovery of his Rochdale property, the settlement of his debts, and the publishing of the *Childe Harold*-he made his maiden speech in the House of Lords, February 27, 1812. The occasion was a Bill to make Frame-breaking punishable by death. Byron's own district, Nottinghamshire, was ^{the} scene of nightly depredations of the workmen who protested against the new machinery. Byron came forward as the protector of the poor weavers. His argument is essentially that which he had expressed more sentimentally in the poetry of his travels:

1. ".....can we forget that it is the bitter policy, the destructive warfare of the last eighteen years, which has destroyed their comfort, your comfort, all men's comfort? That policy, which originating with 'great statesmen now no more' has survived the dead to become a curse on the living, unto the third and fourth generation! Why were the military called out to be made a mockery of, if they were to be called out at all? Are we aware of our obligation to a mob? It is the mob that labour in your fields and serve in your houses,- that man your navy, and recruit your army,- that have enabled you to defy all the world, and can also defy you when neglect and calamity have driven them to despair. A tithe of the bounty bestowed on Portugal would have rendered unnecessary the tender mercies of the bayonet and gibbet. But doubtless our friends have too

many foreign claims to admit a prospect of domestic relief."

So he continues. He advocates investigation and conciliation as the proper means of dealing with the difficulties which, long neglected, were on the point of being disposed of by hasty violence.

The speech was well composed and well delivered, and it elicited many compliments. Byron had been a good orator as a school-boy at Harrow, and now gave promise of being a successful one in the House of Lords. Lord Holland, the leader of the Liberals, took notice of the young advocate for the oppressed. The favorable reception of his speech was followed by a much greater success in the literary field. On the twenty-ninth of February "Childe Harold" came out, and our poet "awoke the next morning to find himself famous." He was now drawn into the vortex of fashionable life in London. Holland House, the rendezvous of prominent Liberals, literary men, artists, and brilliant women, welcomed him; and other salons showered him with invitations. He ran the full course of delights and disappointments of the idol of society.

Between May, 1813, and February, 1816, were published all those Oriental tales, for the appearance of which his admiring public so eagerly waited. ?
Meanwhile, during his association with Lord Holland, Byron had other occasions to air his Liberal views in the House of Lords. In April, 1812, the question of Catholic Emancipation came up again, and Byron contributed a long
1. 2.
speech in its favor. In May, 1813, he presented Major Cartwright's petition for parliamentary reform. In November, 1813, he had another opportunity to espouse the cause of the oppressed by presenting a petition for the reform of prison abuses, but this time he declined. This brings us to some interesting

1. See Letters and Journals, Vol. II, pp. 431-443.

2. See Letters and Journals, Vol. II, pp. 443-445.

phases of Byron's parliamentary status. He had not been eminently successful with the Cartwright petition, for he wrote in his diary while musing on his refusal to present Baldwin's King's Bench petition:

1.

2. "I presented Cartwright's last year; and Stanhope and I stood against the whole House, and mouthed it valiantly- and had some fun and a little abuse for our opposition."

3.

Then he adds,- "But 'I am not i' the vein' for this business."

It would seem that he did not court the idea of bringing another unfavorable topic before the House. Mingled diffidence and indolence and weariness in fighting in an untoward cause prevailed upon him to abandon it. He gave the matter over to Lord Holland, whose position in the House was established. In his diary for November 14 he had written:

4.

"I have declined presenting the Debtor's Petition, being sick of parliamentary mummeries. I have spoken thrice; but I doubt my ever becoming an orator. My first was liked; the second and third- I don't know whether they succeeded or not. I have never yet set to it con amore;- one must have some excuse to one's self for laziness, or inability, or both, and this is mine. 'Company, villanous company, hath been the spoil of me;' - and then, I 'have drunk medicines,' not to make me love others, but certainly enough to hate myself."

Recognizing his duty in the matter he continues thus in the journal of December 1:

1. See Letters and Journals, Vol. II, p. 359.
2. See Letters and Journals, Vol. II, p. 359, Journal, December 1, 1813.
3. See Letters and Journals, Vol. II, p. 318, Journal.
4. Richard III, Act IV, Sc. 2.

1.

"Now, had x x been there, she would have made me do it. There is a woman, who, amid all her fascination, always urged a man to usefulness or glory. Had she remained, she had been my tutelar genius.

2.

3.

"Baldwin is very importunate- but, poor fellow, 'I can't get out, I can't get out,- said the starling.' Ah, I am as bad as that dog Sterne, who

4.

preferred whining over 'a dead ass to relieving a living mother'- villain-hypocrite- slave, sycophant! but I am no better. Here I cannot stimulate myself to a speech for the sake of these unfortunates, and three words and half a smile of x x had she been here to urge it (and urge it she infallibly would- at least she always pressed me on senatorial duties, and particularly in the cause of weakness) would have made me an advocate, if not an orator."

So Byron deserted his "senatorial duties." He was at this period perhaps sufficiently occupied with writing the Oriental tales, and accepting social invitations which his manifold popularity pressed upon him, to excuse a temporary neglect of parliamentary concerns; although a Byron would have suffered little added exertion in attending to them. Soon his courtship, if it may be so called, and his marriage took place; and then his duties as a member of the Committee of Drury Lane Theater and dealings with creditors occupied him. Early in 1816 came the marital rupture and his departure from England for ever, and Byron's active connection with the English Parliament was at an end.

Had this turmoil of activities subsided into a more settled life, and the farewell to England never been spoken, it is hardly probable that his part as a legislator would have been a very influential or even active one. The

1. Letters and Journals, Vol. II, p. 359, Journal.

2. Lady Wedderburn Webster, with whom he was deeply fascinated at that time.

3. Sentimental Journey, (Ed. 1819), Vol. II, p. 379.

4. Ibid., Vol. II, p. 37.

following extract from a letter to Leigh Hunt contains evidence to this effect beyond that connected with the Baldwin petition:

1.

"If you knew what a hopeless and lethargic den of dulness and drawling our hospital is during a debate, and what a mass of corruption in its patients, you would wonder, not that I very seldom speak, but that I ever attempted it, feeling as I trust I do, independently. However, when a proper spirit is manifested 'without doors', I will endeavor not to be idle within."

Byron's personality, his style of oratory, and his power of invective were favorable to his success; but other qualifications were lacking. It was unutterably irksome to one of his restless and impatient nature to listen to long harangues or petty transactions. He was not likely to venture speaking frequently unless he could be considered one of the first speakers of the House; and he did not feel confidence enough in himself in that line to set out with such an object in view. In fact, his self-consciousness would probably have interfered with his success. Considering how eagerly he awaited the verdict of the public on his published works, an unfavorable reception of a personal performance would have been unbearable to him. He probably refused to present Baldwin's King's Bench petition partly through fear of repeating his insignificant lack of success with the Cartwright petition.

Aside from these considerations, Byron was probably wearied by the prospect of uselessly buffeting against the strongly intrenched Tory party. He could never recognize a value in exertion that was sure of failing ~~of fail-~~ing of its end and had only a kind of martyrdom as a result. His political verse, though bold, was trimmed with a certain caution,- at least enough to

1. Letters and Journals, Vol. III, p. 259. To Leigh Hunt, January 29, 1816.

protect him from personal inconvenience. The "Lines to a Lady Weeping" called forth a tirade of newspaper abuse, to which he could respond with studied disdain; but it brought him into no danger of defenceless humiliation, such as Hunt and Hobhouse suffered in a prison sentence as a result of their Jacobinic writings. Byron was no martyr. He had none of that dogged patience and perseverance which carried his friend Hobhouse on through many years of laborious struggling, until his cause and his party were victorious. On the other hand, if his own party had been in the lead, he would have lacked the zest of the fight, which always seemed necessary to call forth his best efforts. On the whole, if we grant that Byron was eminently fitted by general characteristics for a parliamentary career, his lack of inclination toward and of faith in seriousness of purpose, his general restless dissatisfaction and indifference would have made his service negligible.

Perhaps we should not refer to Byron as a party-man. He was, to be sure, decidedly against the Tories, and he voted with the Whigs; but he was much too independent to be bound in thought by party lines. At the same time he could not conceive of a man's changing opinions and party. Change was, to him, perversion of principle. His rancorous treatment of Southey on the score of his defection from the Liberal cause is well-known. He even twitted his friend Hobhouse upon his leaving the regulation Whigs, when their bounds became too strait, and forming with others a more radical branch. Hobhouse was wroth with Byron's levity in a matter so serious to himself. Byron's independence and impulsive type of sincerity would have made it difficult for him to work with a party. At the same time, his pride would hardly have permitted him to act at variance with the party with which he was identified. Political inconsistency bore too much the appearance of the renegade. Byron was always anxious to keep his reputation spotless with regard to his political con-

stancy. In December, 1813, he wrote to John Murray:

1.

"If you send to the Globe E^r, say that I want neither excuse nor contradiction, but merely a continuance of a most ill-grounded charge. I never was consistent in anything but my politics; and as my redemption depends on that solitary virtue, it is murder to carry away my last anchor."

In his journal of a few weeks later we find:

2.

"I shall adhere to my party, because it would not be honourable to act otherwise; but as to opinions, I don't think politics worth an opinion. Conduct is another thing:- if you begin with a party, go on with them."

The extent, however, to which Byron might have been willing to go with his Liberalism is another matter. He wrote to Leigh Hunt in 1816:

3.

"When a proper spirit is manifested 'without doors', I will endeavour not to be idle within. Do you think such a time is coming? Methinks there are gleams of it. My forefathers were of the other side of the question in Charles' days, and the fruit of it was a title and the loss of an enormous property.

"If the old struggle comes on, I may lose the one, and shall never regain the other; but no matter: there are things, even in this world, better than either."

Naturally his Liberalism led him on to thoughts of a real revolution in England. But such extreme wishes seem to have come much less often than we should expect. Byron wanted justice and unselfishness in the administration of government and freedom for all the people.

1. Letters and Journals, Vol. II, p. 312.

2. Letters and Journals, Vol. II, p. 381, Journal, January 16, 1814.

3. Letters and Journals, Vol. III, p. 260, To Leigh Hunt, January 29, 1816.

Aside from the selfish motives he had in wishing the government maintained, he believed, at least a goodly part of the time, that these conditions could be brought about under the English form of government. Wrong and disaster might be averted if England would return to her own real path; if she would follow her own traditions of freedom; if the people as a whole would protest against oppression and betrayal of trust in their administrators instead of meanly catering to their favor. The English Constitution in its integrity was free, and now but perverted from its onward course of development. Reform could be wrought on constitutional lines; and it were better so. But if, with sufficient popular pressure, matters still refused to be mended, there must be a complete revolution.

Byron was uncertain that the form of government was of great concern. He was, altogether, very certain and emphatic in his destructive policy, but rather lacking on the constructive side. He had some skepticism with regard to the great claims made for the republic, although he recognized it as the form best adapted to assure liberty. On the men to whom the administration was entrusted, whether in a republic or in a monarchy would depend the outcome. We see in the following eulogistic outburst on the republic, how he emphasizes the part of the leaders, rather than the share of the people in the government:

1.

"Here we are, retrograding to the dull, stupid old system, - balance of Europe - poising straws upon kings' noses instead of wringing them off! Give me a republic, or a despotism of one, rather than the mixed government of one, two, three. A republic! - Look in the history of the earth - Rome, Greece, Venice, France, Holland, America, our short (ahem!) Commonwealth, and

compare it with what they did under masters. The Asiatics are not qualified to be republicans, but they have the liberty of demolishing despots, which is the next thing to it. To be the first man- not the Dictator- not the Sylla, but the Washington or the Aristides- the leader in talent and truth- is next to the Divinity! Franklin, Penn, and next to these, either Brutus or Cassius- even Mirabeau- or St. Just."

Byron's invectives against England were usually tinged by personal antipathies, or even actuated by personal hatred. They were directed against the bigotry and vulgarity of the Georges, the duplicity of Castlereagh, the inefficiency and conceit of the Duke of Wellington. In spite of Napoleon's despotic actions, Byron expected great things of him as Emperor of the French on account of his personal ability and success. He found a malicious delight^{1.} in seeing Napoleon humiliate the "stupid, legitimate- old- dynasty boobies of regular bred sovereigns."

Although Byron was very violent in the expression of his opinions, he abhorred extreme Radicalism in political action, especially when it became undignified by its fanaticism or useless and ridiculous by its failure. If violence were necessary it should be dealt in one tremendous, united, blow that would end in success; or if in failure, in failure at least dignified,^{2.} final, and glorious. When Leigh Hunt was in prison the first time, Byron felt some admiration toward him for having been bold enough to express his opinions in defiance of a prison sentence. Even then he was suspicious that^{3.} Hunt was "perhaps a little opinionated." Later he grew to despise more and more a radicalism that consumed itself in its own heat. He tells us of having

1. Letters and Journals, Vol. II, p. 324, Journal, November 17, 1813.

2.

3.

tried to deter a friend from danger of suffering a penalty like Hunt's:

1.

"So Webster is writing again! I went upon my knees to him almost, some years ago, to prevent him from publishing a political pamphlet, which would have given him a livelier idea of 'Habeas Corpus' than the world will derive from his present production upon that suspended subject, which will doubtless be followed by the suspension of other (his Majesty's) subjects."

We have also a record of what his opinions of Radicalism were in 1823:

2.

"At the period of his stay here (Argostoli, in Cephalonia) we were receiving accounts by the Public Prints of the war in Spain, and some of our zealous advocates for the cause of liberty were just then making rather a sorry figure. His Lordship repeatedly asked me, I know not why, if I were a 'Radical,' to which I replied that I did not profess political opinions of so decided a cast. He said he was not one, and that some of them had brought it into disrepute of late, alluding apparently to the most conspicuous of the Volunteers in the Spanish cause. On one of these occasions, when he put the same question to me, I named two relatives of mine who had exhibited enough of radicalism to visit Mr. Lee Hunt when he was in Cold Bath Fields Prison. His Lordship repeated, 'when he was in prison'- adding, 'when is he ever out'!"

As zealously as Byron might wish for liberty, he did not want to be known as one identified with a cause in disrepute, or rather, as concurring in the undignified methods of the lower classes. He became very impatient

1. Letters and Journals, Vol. IV, p. 99. To John Murray, April 9, 1817.
2. Letters and Journals, Vol. VI, p. 427. Charles Hancock to Henry Muir, June 1, 1824.

with the ungentle actions of some of the popular reformers in England, and
at seeing his ^{1.} "friends sacrifice themselves for a pack of blackguards" with
whom they worked in the same cause.

2.
"No one," he cries, "can be more sick of, or indifferent to, politics
than I am, if they let me alone; but if the time comes when a part must be
taken one way or the other, I shall pause before I lend myself to the views
of such ruffians, although I cannot but approve of a Constitutional ameliora-
tion of long abuses."

"Lord George Gordon, and Wilkes, and Burdett, and Horne Tooke, were all
men of education and courteous deportment; so is Hobhouse; but as for these
others, I am convinced that Robespierre was a child, and Marat a Quaker in
comparison of what they would be, could they throttle their way to power."

We are reminded by his words here, that general apathy, and indifference,
and cynicism, toward politics and other definite pursuits, were growing upon
him.

We notice, also, that he still speaks of "constitutional amelioration
of long abuses." There was in Byron an uncontrovertible conflict of the con-
servative and the radical. He respected age in custom and understood the
value of historical precedents. He believed in the aristocracy of noble
lineage, which, as a rule, notably in his own case, he considered as a surety
for talent and ability. Yet his whole unrestrained nature rebelled against
the rigidity and dullness of a set, an hereditary system of sovereignty.

His true love of justice, of unrestraint for himself and all men was
one of the principal reasons for this rebellion; his pride was another. He
lauded the Americans; he wrote the "Irish Avatar," the "Lines on a Lady

1. Letters and Journals, Vol. IV, p. 410. To John Murray.

2.

Weeping," the "Vision of Judgment"; he contemplated going to South America to live in Bolivar's new republic among free people; he helped the Italians and the Greeks; he championed Napoleon as the leveller of old-dynasty sovereigns.

But while he hated kings as kings, he usually hated them rather because they were poor kings. The Georges were insufferable to him because they were poor, stupid rulers. Byron's pride suffered to have the higher order degrade and disgrace itself, barter its honor and fall from its noble function of protector and patron of the people. Such rulers, he thought, ought to be deprived of their high station; he who has the natural dignity and ability should rule. Byron's pride, mean and trivial though it was in many respects, had a broader bearing of pride in manhood and the glory of its achievement. It was partly this more noble pride which moved him to champion the cause of those who were kept by the oppression of their fellowmen from rising to the dignity that might be possible to them with proper opportunity, or who were trying to free themselves from masters not chosen by themselves. This pride was present when, in poetry and in reality, he called the Greeks to arms.

We should distinguish that Byron valued the republic for its freedom, and not for its vaunted equality. He would always have us know that he was for the people, but not of the people. His attitude toward the people has sometimes been compared with that of Napoleon. The likeness is probably overdrawn. He had not so great a disdain of the people as Napoleon. He believed that, with proper conditions for development, they could rise to higher planes, and he desired that they should rise.

Yet Byron had a proper contempt and loathing for the weaknesses of the common people, and for their "inferiority." He always demanded deference to his rank. He resented being compared with Rousseau because the latter was a servant and the son of an artisan. We know that he hated the radicalism of

those of the commonalty who were zealous for power. The following extract from Don Juan shows pretty well his political attitude toward the masses:

1.

"It is not that I adulate the people;

Without me there are demagogues enough,

x x x x x x x x

I only know I wish men to be free,

As much from mobs as kings, from you as me.

The consequence is, being of no party,

I shall offend all parties. Never mind!"

Nevertheless, Byron recognized the republic as the true, the final form of government for assuring liberty to all. He lauded Washington as the ideal figure of a democratic ruler,- the liberator of his people, governing wisely as a servant at their behest. Yet, at the same time, Washington was not the kind of hero that his temperament demanded; his figure is not theatrical enough. Byron's admiration and longing went out to the mighty prince who has scorned his nation's foes and brought them low, and who, with power to oppress to the last degree, out of his splendid magnanimity rules his debtors with justice,- aye more, with generous liberality- and gains their love and loyalty through all crises.

Such a glorious hero was Napoleon to him. But alas! How could he fall so low? He grew mean and despicable when he became the invader of homes, an

1. Don Juan, Canto IX. Stanzas XXV, XXVI.

oppressor and enslaver instead of a liberator; when he meanly abdicated his throne and bowed before his betrayers. The "Ode to Napoleon" is afire with indignation and bitterness toward him. It is the bitterness of disappointment in one who had been to him the incarnation of the glorious spirit of French freedom, and who should have led that spirit on to victory; it is disgust with one who having soared to such heroic heights, would stoop ignobly to the

1.

"slaves who had betrayed him," that only he might not die. We would not fall into the error of Southey, who, when he had read Byron's ode, said:

2.

"The last time I saw him he asked me if I did not think Bonaparte a great man in his villany. I told him, no- that he was a mean-minded villain. And Lord Byron has now been brought to the same opinion."

Surely we should not take from the "Ode" that Byron had been brought to the same opinion. He still believed that the abdication was the weakness, the fall of a great man, and not the natural sequence of a mind naturally mean. In the lines,

3.

"Is it some yet imperial hope

That with such change can calmly cope?"

a hope is faintly shadowed that perhaps, after all, this action of Napoleon is only a feint to gain time and strength for another effort; or that the real nature of the man must needs reassert itself after this lapse. His letters show this idea unmistakably; for example, we have:

4.

"I shall think higher of rhyme and reason, and very humbly of your heroic people, till- Elba becomes a volcano, and sends him out again. I

1. "Age of Bronze."

2. Letters and Journals.

3. Ode to Napoleon, Stanza V, ll. 5, 6.

4. Letters and Journals, Vol. III, p. 70. To Thomas Moore, April 22, 1814.

can't think it all over yet. In the "Age of Bronze," written in 1822, we may see how much he believed was possible of Napoleon:

1.

"A single step into the right had made

This man the Washington of worlds betrayed:

A single step into the wrong has given

His name a doubt to all the winds of heaven."

Byron's admiration of the great Emperor, his "Héros de Roman," comes forth again and again, after Elba, and Waterloo, and St. Helena, in his letters

2.

and in numerous poems.

1. "Age of Bronze," ll. 233, 234.

2. For a full account of Byron's reception of the news of Waterloo, see Letters and Journals, Vol. II, p. 323, note 2. See also Letters and Journals, Vol. II, p. 409, Journal, April 9, 1814. For poems dealing with Napoleon see "Ode to Napoleon Buonaparte," "Napoleon's Farewell," "From the French," "Ode from the French," "The Age of Bronze," and "Childe Harold," Canto III, Stanza XVII to XLV.

V.

In Byron's later years his attitude toward English affairs became more settled. He had desired that reform in England should come from within as a natural evolution of the English Constitution, from a starting point toward freedom which had been made in years gone by. But the long continuation of the same repressive policy had made such a hope seem vain. Byron's position is best shown in a note written in 1821 for "The Two Foscari," as a reply to Southey, who had objected to the "Don Juan" on the ground that its immorality and disloyalty would tend to corrupt and destroy the government:

1.

" the French Revolution was not occasioned by any writings whatsoever, but must have occurred had no such writers ever existed. It is the fashion to attribute everything to the French Revolution, and the French Revolution to everything but its real cause. That cause is obvious- the government exacted too much, and the people could neither give nor bear more. Without this the encyclopedists might have written their fingers off without the occurrence of a single alteration. And the English Revolution- (the first, I mean)- what was it occasioned by? The Puritans were surely as pious and moral as Wesley or his biographer? Acts- acts on the part of government, and not writings against them, have caused the past convulsions, and are tending to the future.

"I look upon such as inevitable, though no revolutionist: I wish to see the English Constitution restored and not destroyed. Born an aristocrat, and naturally one by temper, with the greater part of my present property in the

funds, what have I to gain by a revolution? Perhaps I have more to lose in every way than Mr. Southey, with all his places and presents for panegyrics and abuse into the bargain. But that a revolution is inevitable, I repeat. The government may exult over the repression of petty tumults; these are but the receding waves repulsed and broken for a moment on the shore, while the great tide is rolling on and gaining ground with every breaker."

Revolution Byron believed was inevitable, and truly a desideratum. But he had rather, now, that it should come after his time. He did not want to lose the fortune which permitted him to follow his own inclinations; he did not want to be disturbed in his "way of life." He did not anticipate a "row" with the same youthful zest with which he had written to Thomas Moore in 1816:

1.

"Are you not near the Luddites? By the Lord! if there's a row, but I'll be among ye."

The cause of English liberation was not so near to him as it had been. Long continuation of the policy he hated had made him indifferent and cynical toward it. Nevertheless, he hated and turned his censure upon it to the last; but his later satire of English hypocrisy and repression was more mockingly and lightly, though more keenly wielded than the lashing, frothing satire of the early days.

Byron's selfishness comes forth in a letter to his half-sister Augusta. It gives an excellent partial characterization of himself as he was at that time. Byron, in apprehension of troublous times in England, had suggested placing his funds elsewhere:

2.

"If the funds were to go, you do not suppose that I would sit down quietly under it: no, in that case I will make one amongst them, if we are

1. Letters and Journals, Vol. IV, p. 30. To Thomas Moore, Dec. 24, 1816.

2. Letters and Journals, Vol. IV, p. 397. To the Hon. Augusta Leigh, January 2, 1820.

to come to civil buffeting; and perhaps not the mildest. I would wish to finish my days in quiet; but should the time arrive, when it becomes the necessity of every man to act however reluctantly upon the circumstances of the country, I won't be roused up for nothing, and if I do take a part, it will be such a one as my opinions of mankind, a temper not softened by what it has seen and undergone, a mind grown indifferent to pursuits and results, but capable of effort and of strength under oppression or stimulus, but without ambition, because it looks upon all human attempts as conducting to no rational or practicable advantage, would induce me to adopt. And perhaps such a man, forced to act from necessity, would, with the temper I have described, be about as dangerous an animal as ever joined in ravage.

"There is nothing which I should dread more than to trust to my own temper, or to have to act in such scenes as I think must soon ensue in England. It is this made me think of South America, or the Cape, or Turkey, or anywhere, so that I can but preserve my independence of means to live withal. But if, in this coming crash, my fortunes are to be swept down with the rest, why then the only barrier which holds me aloof from taking a part in these miserable squabbles being broken down, I will fight my way too, with what success I know not, but with what moderation I know too well. If you but knew how I despise and abhor all these men, and all these things, you would easily suppose how reluctantly I contemplate being called upon to act with or against any of the parties. All I desire is to preserve what remains of the fortunes of our house, and then they may do as they please."

In contrast to this we have a noble passage from the diary he kept in Italy while he was interested in the revolution there:

1. 2.

"Consulted with P. G., etc., etc. They mean to insurrect here, and are to honor me with a call thereupon. I shall not fall back, though I don't think them in force or heart sufficient to make much of it. But, onward! it is now the time to act, and what signifies self, if a single spark of that which would be worthy of the past can be bequeathed unquenchedly to the future? It is not one man, nor a million, but the spirit of liberty which must be spread. The waves which dash upon the shore, are, one by one, broken, but yet the ocean conquers, nevertheless. It overwhelms the Armada, it wears the rock, and, if the Neptunians are to be believed, it has not only destroyed, but made a world. In like manner, whatever the sacrifice of individuals, the great cause will gather strength, sweep down what is rugged, and fertilize (for sea-weed is manure) what is cultivable. And so, the mere selfish calculation ought never to be made on such occasions; and at present, it shall not be computed by me. I was never a good arithmetician of chances, and shall not commence now."

There is no reason to doubt the sincerity of this little homily to himself. It was not merely idle sentiment. Byron helped the Italians at danger to his life, in their attempt to throw off the Austrian yoke. The authorities kept a rigid watch upon him and sought an opportunity to seize him. He received anonymous letters threatening his life; and a notice which set a price on his head was posted in the market place at Venice.

It was Byron's way not to project himself aggressively into the Italian insurrection, or any other enterprise. He waited to be assured that he was really sought and that his part would count. The philosophy which he had de-

1. Letters and Journals, Vol. V, p. 163. Diary, January 9, 1821.
2. Pietro Gamba, brother of the Countess Guiccioli, and prominent Italian Radical.

veloped, if he had one at all, was laissez faire. The influence in drawing him into the Italian revolution was friendship with the Gambas, father and brother of his mistress, the Countess Guiccioli. Byron's sympathies being known, however, he would without doubt ^{have} been appealed to by some other means if not through the Gambas. When occasion called, he acted with impulsive promptness and daring and disregard of consequences. At one time, having ^{1.} supplied arms and ammunition for a large number of the Carbonari, he was brought into imminent danger by having them, upon a sudden alarm, return the supplies and deposit them in his house. His diary shows one of his plans for the insurrection:

2.

"I know little of their numbers, but think the Carbonari strong enough to beat the troops even here. With twenty men this house might be defended for twenty-four hours against any force to be brought against it and in such a time, the country would have notice and would rise,- if they ever will rise, of which there is some doubt."

Byron's reluctance to enter serious enterprises came forth when he was called upon to take a responsible part in the cause of the Greeks when they rose to gain independence from Turkish sovereignty. There were many considerations to give him cause for deliberation and indecision before entering the Greek service. The position to be filled was a difficult one. The Greeks, treacherous and quarrelsome, were divided into factions under native leaders. Foreign sympathizers aggravated the confusion by entering into the factions and by introducing unpractical plans for immediate adoption of extreme democratic ideas. The funds for carrying on the struggle were very low. Byron's habitual indecision which had come to one always discontented and with

1. A secret Italian revolutionary society.

2. Letters and Journals, Vol.

no definite purposes in life, was always operative. But swift action was Byron's stronghold, and once he had entered the lists he became a vigorous leader. The grasp which he showed in organizing and advising in Greek affairs is striking.

Byron's private fortune supplied a large part of the funds with which it was possible to sustain the movement for the liberation of Greece. There are those who would attribute Byron's great personal and pecuniary sacrifices to purely selfish motives. To be sure, he was ambitious and loved personal glory. But there is no definite reason for denying public motives to one who had shown throughout his life that he was deeply in sympathy with the cause of liberty throughout the earth and particularly in Greece, the cradle of democracy, and who was not lacking in great boldness and generosity of spirit. Byron received hints from one of the factions that they wanted a king; and he is reported to have said that he would not reject an offer of the throne of Greece. There is nothing particularly striking in this incident. Byron's position is perfectly consistent with his political views, and probably with his ability. There was no broaching of such an idea when Byron first took up his enterprise, and little certainty of such an outcome. He left Italy not with a feeling that he was approaching renown, but with a foreboding that he would never return to his friends. That foreboding was realized when he succumbed to a fever at Mesolonghi, April 19, 1824.

With the death of Byron was lost the great representative among English poets of the revolutionary spirit of the nineteenth century. He and Shelley alone held to the discredited revolutionary cause. Shelley's lofty idealism shielded him from the disappointments of harsh mundane experience. But Byron had felt the galling strength of the forces of tyranny, and he knew what were the vices and frailties of those for whom he pleaded and strove; yet he re-

mained true to liberty in her humiliation, in her reptile form. Besides his personal endeavors in her cause, he has left us a lasting monument to liberty in his poetry. Through all, he held to his sole article of faith, firm that

1.

"The time is past when swords subdued-

Man may die- the soul's renew'd:

Even in this low world of care

Freedom ne'er shall want an heir."

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